

A ULI Rose Center Report

# Connecting the Depot District

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**Urban Land  
Institute**

**Rose Center for Public Leadership**

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## Executive Summary

The City of Sacramento and its partners should pursue replacing the I Street Bridge over the Sacramento River, investigate the removal of I Street's I-5 northbound entrance ramp, and take a number of relatively low-cost, short-term actions to both improve access to its intermodal transportation hub and to attract transit-supportive development in the Depot District of the Sacramento Railyards, according to a panel of experts assembled by the Urban Land Institute's Rose Center for Public Leadership who visited the site from October 10-12, 2012.

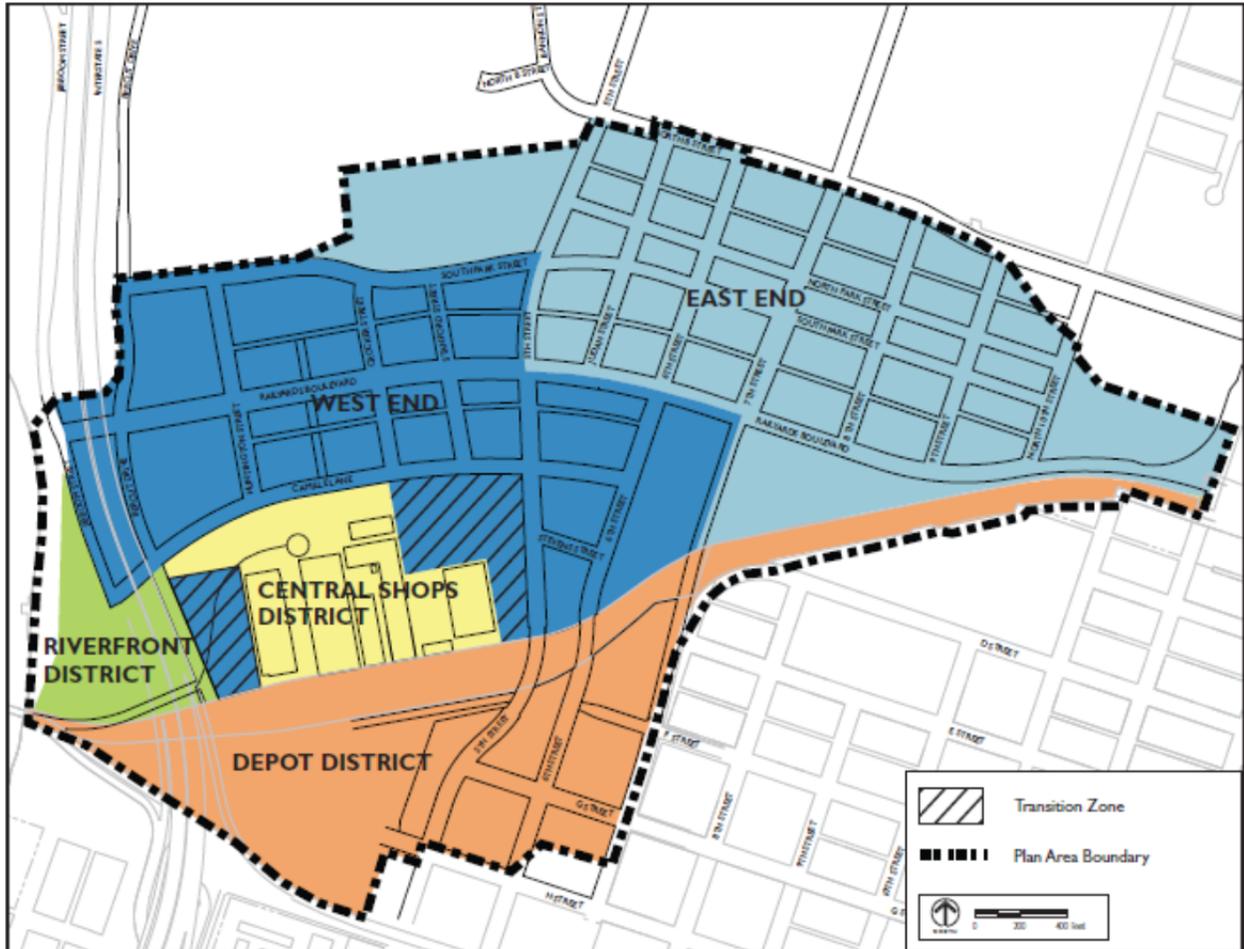


Figure 1: The Depot District (orange) in relation to the entire Sacramento Railyards site

In their advice to the City on how to enhance access to the Depot District—some developable 17 acres in the southwest portion of the 240-acre Railyards redevelopment site (see Figure 1, above)—the Rose Center's urban planning, development, and transportation experts stressed the need to immediately improve the pedestrian environment around the new Sacramento Valley Station and its associated transportation services, as well to inform the public about the Railyards' history, infrastructure projects happening on the site, and the vision for the Railyards' future.

In the short-term, the panel recommended that the City:

- Improve signage, wayfinding, lane-markings, and traffic signals in the vicinity of the Depot District as appropriate to enhance pedestrian access to intermodal transportation services

- Improve temporary at-grade parking areas adjacent to historic Southern Pacific Depot and pedestrian access from the garage under the I-5 viaduct
- Review the approved street design plans from the specific plan for the Railyards before constructing new infrastructure to ensure the original development concepts they were intended to support still make sense
- Ensure that the new county courthouse on Lot 41 (bound by 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, G and H streets) is designed to create a gateway to Depot District

To improve governance and management of the infrastructure work happening in the Depot District and throughout the Railyards project area, the panel supports the City's decision to appoint a single project manager within City government with decision-making authority. It is crucial that authority for critical decisions, including on-the-spot solutions, is centralized under this project manager and her team so that decisions are made with the bigger picture in mind and without any unintended consequences for development. The panel also recommended that the City create a formal coordination mechanism for its partner agencies and jurisdictions to regularly meet and provide updates about the project.

Now that the tracks have successfully been relocated and the new Sacramento Valley Station is operational, the panel suggested that the city introduce, celebrate and take advantage of the site's new reality by hosting opening events and providing public information about the project's progress and future, allowing temporary uses in the Depot District and events and festivals, and applying graphics and exterior lighting to the historic Central Shops buildings now that people can get near enough to actually see them for the first time.

The panel recommended the following longer-term actions to improve both the function of intermodal transportation activities as well as the potential for transit-supportive development in the Depot District and the greater Railyards redevelopment site:

- Pursue the replacement of the I Street Bridge as a bridge for vehicular traffic across the Sacramento River and the removal of its associated access viaducts (rail use would remain)
- Investigate the removal of I Street's northbound I-5 on-ramp
- Study opportunities for new at-grade street connections to the Depot District
- Designate a street network hierarchy for streets accessing the Depot District (and future streets that will provide circulation within it) to establish infrastructure priorities and set development expectations
- Develop the intermodal facilities program based on actual and projected modal splits and usage patterns
- Create a strategic plan for the City's downtown development activity goals
- Develop a Sacramento River plan addressing both sides of the river jointly with West Sacramento

## Project Background

In fall 2010, the Rose Center invited Mayor Kevin Johnson (representing the City of Sacramento) to participate in its 2010-2011 class of Daniel Rose Fellows. Through the fellowship program, the City asked the Rose Center to help determine what actions would position the Sacramento Railyards to attract a significant share of regional development over the long term that would complement investment in Sacramento's downtown—and what activities or investments could be early catalysts. This eventually included evaluating the proposal for a new entertainment and sports complex adjacent to the planned Sacramento Intermodal Transportation Facility. Mayor Johnson selected Assistant City Manager John Dangberg, Sacramento Area Council of Governments Executive Director Mike McKeever, and Hodgson Company President John Hodgson as the City's Daniel Rose Fellows, and picked Sacramento Community Development Department Infill Coordinator Desmond Parrington to serve as the fellowship team's coordinator.

Over a four-day site visit in January 2011, a panel of experts assembled by the Rose Center was briefed by Sacramento's Rose Fellowship team and toured the Railyards site and its historic Central Shops buildings; the existing station and its historic Southern Pacific Depot; and adjacent areas such as Old Sacramento, Downtown Plaza, and the K Street corridor. The panel also interviewed elected officials from the area, representatives from state and local government agencies and regional organizations, downtown business leaders, transportation officials, community organizations, members of the private real estate sector and urban design professions, and representatives of Inland American, the current private owners of the portion of the Railyards primarily north of the railroad tracks.

The panel made several recommendations for the City to promote the redevelopment of the Railyards, including the following:

- Create a transit district, not a facility (see Figure 2)
- Target public and private investments to create incremental projects that sustain themselves over time
- Build complete neighborhoods, not isolated projects
- Create a strong open-space network in phases by linking open space, framing parks with development, and building great streets
- Celebrate the Central Shops buildings and other focal points within the site
- Utilize low-cost interim uses to draw people to the Railyards and generate interest

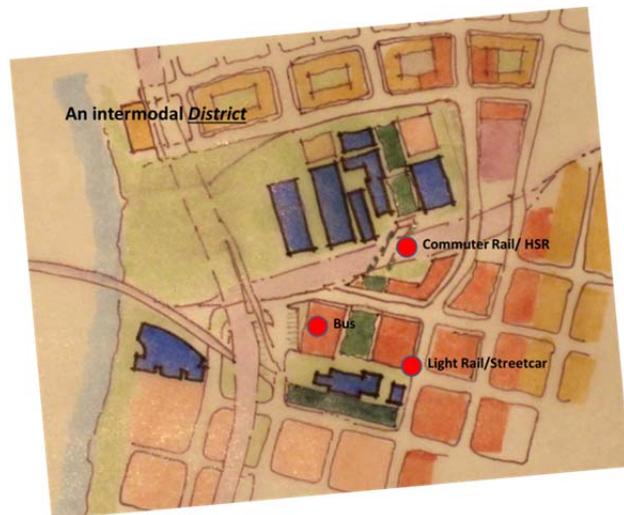


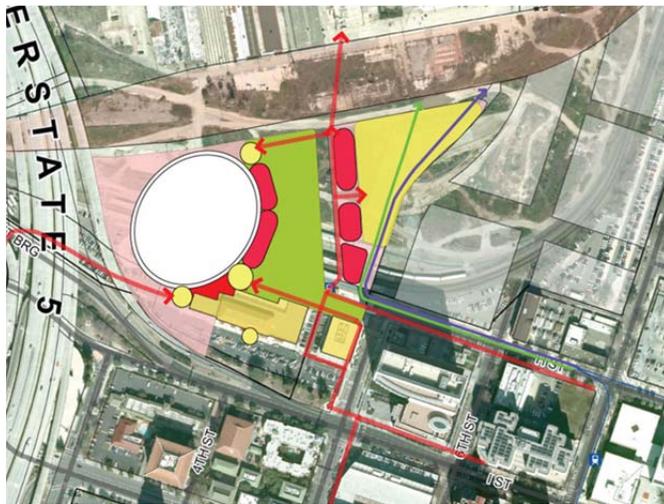
Figure 2: Intermodal district concept with joint development

On the question of potential catalyst projects—whether a courthouse, arena or other proposal in the future—the Rose Center suggested that the City evaluate each within the larger context of the Railyards and ask:

- Would it add value to the overall experience or draw of the Railyards—especially considering potential users?

- How would it affect future phases of development?
- What would be the return on current or planned investment?

Working with the Railyards major property owner, Inland American, as well as its transportation agency partners, the City quickly began to implement several of these recommendations, including investing more than \$200 million in infrastructure to connect the Railyards to Downtown (as was previously planned). Additionally, the City is currently investing another \$11 million in the structural retrofit of the Depot building and is developing plans for a \$30 million overall rehabilitation that will open up all three floors of the building. The building will serve as the gateway into the Depot District area and will continue to house transportation functions.



**Figure 3: Follow-up visit panel's site concept for entertainment/sports complex and intermodal**

At the City's request, the Rose Center returned in July 2011 to provide recommendations (see Figure 3) on how an entertainment/sports complex in an arena development format might fit adjacent to the planned intermodal facility. After meeting, touring the site and meeting with key stakeholders, the Rose Center offered that, "both the intermodal and arena can be accommodated in symbiotic way that creates public space, provides connectivity and achieves synergies with surrounding districts," but recommended further detailed study of the site to ensure both the transit activity and the entertainment/sports facility could be designed to function well in tandem.

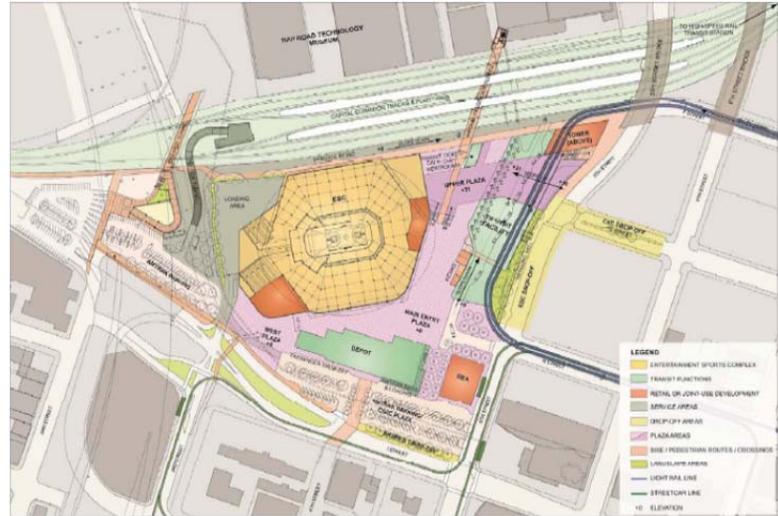
Based on these recommendations and as part of the preparatory work for a new entertainment/sports complex in the Railyards, the City hired a consulting team of AECOM and Fehr & Peers for site planning and transportation analysis of the Depot District, which would include the intermodal facilities and proposed arena. Despite the demise of a potential agreement between the City and the National Basketball Association's Sacramento Kings franchise to provide financial support and be the complex's major tenant, staff was directed to complete this work to find the optimal location for the various transportation facilities and determine the best site for an arena.

The consultant team provided detailed analyses and options (see Figure 4, next page) for how to implement the ULI recommendations for the siting and functioning of intermodal transportation activities and the proposed entertainment/sports complex. While the consultants found that both uses could function in Depot District, they identified some design challenges that would force the transit providers and the arena operators to accept some functional compromises, such as:

- A minimal truck loading area for the arena
- The likelihood of tight flows in the pedestrian plaza during peak loading times
- The mixing of arena and transit patrons at event times
- The opportunity cost for other transit-oriented development on the site

Even if these were accepted and resolved through active on-site management by the operators, the consultants found that significant challenges remain, foremost of which is the lack of connections between the Depot District and the surrounding areas, particularly the Sacramento Riverfront, Old Sacramento, and West Sacramento. There are major access barriers that would impact the development potential of the Depot District (regardless of which joint development uses occur there in addition to transit). These include:

- On-ramps from I Street to I-5 that speed vehicular traffic and create challenges for pedestrian movements across I Street from a major pedestrian gateway to the Depot District;
- Multiple large concrete viaducts that connect to the I-Street bridge;
- Unattractive and circuitous connections from Old Sacramento to I Street and the Depot;
- Limited connections to the waterfront; and
- An inadequate connection to West Sacramento (the obsolete I Street bridge).



**Figure 4: One of the consultant team’s detailed site plan options, taking into account how the arena would be serviced**

Based on initial analysis, City staff believed there were opportunities to improve infrastructure connections to make this area a more functional and attractive site for transit users as well as for potential development. To explore this concept further and identify implementation steps, the City provided funding to reimburse the Rose Center to bring back a panel of experts—including several from the original two visits—in October 2012 to assess possibilities for improved connectivity and what that may mean for development of the area—whether for an arena or other types of transit-supportive joint development. Upon conclusion of the ULI work, the City intends to bring back its consultant team of Fehr & Peers and AECOM to develop specific implementation tasks based on the ULI Rose Center panel’s new recommendations.

## Progress and Challenges

The panel was impressed with the accomplishments in the Railyards since their original visit 20 months earlier. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Street bridge structures over the realigned tracks have been completed. Hazardous materials abatement has been completed in the Central Shops buildings. The tracks have been relocated for the (pleasantly designed) new Sacramento Valley Station platforms and freight has been separated from passenger rail. The new western pedestrian/bike tunnel and ramps connecting to the Central Shops District to Old Sacramento and structural retrofit of the historic Depot are underway and will be complete in 2013.



**Figure 5: The station has been relocated with attractive new entrances, and a new crosswalk allows pedestrians to cross I Street in front of the Depot's historic main entrance**

Furthermore, following the recommendations of the original panel, the City installed a traffic signal on I Street at the old alignment of 4<sup>th</sup> Street (now a pedestrian path through the Chinatown Mall) with a north-south crosswalk on the east side of the intersection that leads to the front door of the Depot (see Figure 5, above). As described previously, the City also did its diligence from both a planning and fiscal perspective on the concept of an entertainment/sports complex in the Depot District as a catalyst project.

In light of all this progress, the panel suggested that the City introduce, celebrate and take advantage of the site's new reality by hosting opening events and providing public information about project's progress and future, allowing temporary uses like food trucks or farmers' markets in the Depot District and events and festivals, and applying graphics and exterior lighting to the historic Central Shops buildings now that people can get near enough to actually see them for the first time. In Santa Fe, New Mexico, that city partnered with the Trust for Public Land to build a park around its old railyards with interpretive displays about its historic remnants even as new development occurred on the site.

But large- and small-scale challenges remain. Looking at both sides of the Sacramento River, there is a tremendous amount of potential development area in the urban core. These include large and small projects and proposals in the Bridge District and Washington neighborhood in West Sacramento, as well as the Railyards site (for which Inland American is looking for a development partner or outright buyer) and the Downtown Plaza Mall, located south of J Street between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets, which was recently sold by Westfield Group to the San Francisco-based investment company JMA Ventures.

The potential redevelopment of Downtown Plaza could play a significant role in shaping the future of downtown Sacramento and link the Depot District into the fabric of downtown. But it also has the potential

to absorb significant urban product market share that might otherwise be built in the Railyards. In a market the size of Sacramento, it could take 50 years for all of these opportunity sites to be completely built out. Understanding the likely timing of market absorption is important for the government jurisdictions and their partners as they move ahead with financing plans and development programs for specific projects.

Furthermore, the larger-scale of these projects will make significant demands on the City's human and financial capacity. From the City's perspective, having a strategic plan for its redevelopment goals in the urban core could be a useful tool to guide how it administers that capacity in the years ahead and to identify when resources are at risk of being overcommitted or diverted from where they are most needed at the time.

### Short-Term Improvements to the Pedestrian Environment

Returning to the site level, there are still significant pedestrian accessibility barriers to the Depot District that should be addressed in the near term because of the intermodal. Many of these can be overcome by simply improving signage and wayfinding, and altering lane-markings and traffic control in the vicinity of the Depot District.

For example, while the 4<sup>th</sup> Street intersection improvements are a great start, I Street still has the design vernacular of an interstate highway west of 5<sup>th</sup> Street. This is incompatible with its role as - a front door to the Depot District. The City should look for immediate opportunities to tame I Street vehicular behavior and make pedestrians the priority access mode to the Depot District, since it is intended to be a hub of pedestrian activity as both a transportation center and eventually as a destination in its own right. One immediate suggestion is to allow for a new north-south cross walk on the west side of the intersection of 5<sup>th</sup> and I streets (see Figure 6, below).



**Figure 6: North-south pedestrian movements are not permitted today along the west side of the intersection of 5<sup>th</sup> and I streets**

Similarly, the development of the Depot District and potential changes to I Street and its associated ramps and viaducts could create an opportunity for a new, at-grade, multi-modal front door to Old Sacramento. (The current main pedestrian entrance is a tunnel under a viaduct pier in the Depot parking lot or via I Street under the I-5 viaduct, which only has sidewalks on the north side of the street.) This would make using the parking garage under the I-5 viaduct more attractive for transit users as well. In the short-term, the panel also recommended improving access from the temporary at-grade parking areas adjacent to Depot by ensuring striping is clear, extraneous fences and other barriers are removed and there is a clearly marked pedestrian path.

The City and its previous private development partner had developed detailed plans, standards and guidelines for the Railyards. Before the next series of funded infrastructure projects move forward, the panel recommended that the City review earlier street design plans to ensure the original development concepts they were intended to support under the previous private development partner still make sense. More urgently though, as the new county courthouse on Lot 41 (bound by 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, G and H streets) is designed, it is important the City ensure that it creates a strong pedestrian gateway to Depot District, especially along H Street, which is a critical access street to the District.

## **Assessing New Opportunities for Connectivity**

The City asked the panel to assess whether its concepts for two major transportation infrastructure projects with significant regional benefits could have a positive impact on the transportation function and development potential of the Depot District. These concepts focus on the replacement of the I Street Bridge, a 100-year old structure with obsolete design, as well access modifications for the I Street/I-5 interchange.

Originally constructed in 1911, with its swing-bridge operation designed to accommodate boats travelling along the Sacramento River, the I Street Bridge is a double-decked bridge with Union Pacific's railroad tracks on the lower deck and a narrow upper deck for automobiles, trucks and brave pedestrians. A series of access ramps on both sides of the river—from C Street in West Sacramento, and from Jibboom, I and J Streets in Sacramento—provide access to the bridge. The bridge no longer provides adequate capacity or reliable non-rail access between downtown Sacramento and West Sacramento.

There is potential for the two cities to apply to the US Department of Transportation's Highway Bridge Program for funding to replace the I Street Bridge. Based on initial research by staff, it would be a strong candidate for a funding match. This would help implement the city's Sacramento River Crossing study, which recommended new crossings both north and south of downtown Sacramento. These recommendations are included in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, estimated at \$150 million each for implementation by 2030.

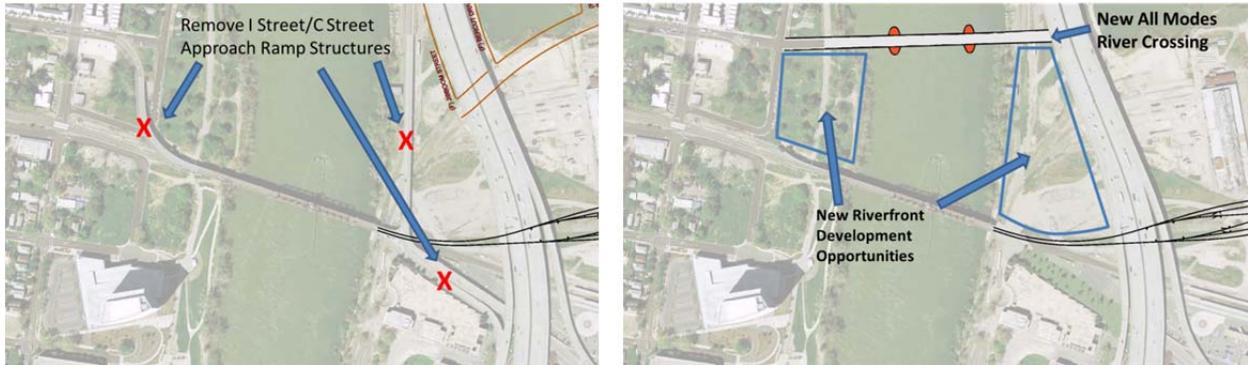
By submitting a joint application to the federal HBP immediately, it would be possible to get a new bridge built in a much sooner timeframe thanks to favorable timing in the transition between the previous and new federal transportation authorizations (SAFETEA-LU and MAP-21). Using HBP to replace the I Street Bridge would also avoid competition between a future bridge north of downtown and a new Sacramento River Crossing south of downtown from the same funding source.

Replacing the I Street Bridge for vehicular/bike/ped traffic would not, however, require moving the railroad bridge. By eliminating use of the roadway above, the railroad bridge could be renovated to remain in its current location and a portion of its load stress would be removed, allowing it to have a longer post-renovation maintenance lifetime and potentially provide other recreational uses. The separate new bridge could also be designed to land as close to grade as possible, eliminating the need for so many access viaducts and allowing for much higher rates of pedestrian and bike usage, which is very challenging on the old existing bridge.

Although it would require further study and engineering, the panel believes that the landing of the new bridge could be positioned to align with the future Railyards Boulevard within the Railyards, or somewhere between Railyards Boulevard and the future Camille Lane. A connection to Railyards Boulevard would be ideal, because it is intended to be the major east-west arterial through the site, and it provides connections to 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets, which will provide north-south connections to both Downtown and the River District.

Moving the I Street Bridge vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle traffic would also obviate the need for its current access viaducts on Jibboom, I and J streets, which as constructed in the 1930s are also at the end of their usable life, and help to simplify and tame westbound traffic options along I Street in front of the Depot. The removal of these three large viaducts would also have the benefit of eliminating an unsightly barrier and

helping to open up the riverfront adjacent to the Railyards, which was envisioned in the original specific plan to include a park with adjacent commercial development—the so-called Riverfront District.



**Figure 7: A new north river crossing aligned with West Sacramento's C Street could eliminate the need to replace aging access viaducts and open up the riverfront**

The removal of the three viaducts would make the land between I-5 and the river much more viable for public use and even some limited development (see Figure 7, above)—although between the at-grade railroad tracks and the elevated I-5 highway, the panel's instinct is that the land would be best suited for public space, especially if it links back into the Railyards from the river. The panel also floated the long-term idea of moving the existing California State Railroad Museum from its current facilities at the north end of Old Sacramento into some of the Central Shops buildings adjacent to its planned California Railroad Technology Museum. With the removal of the I and J street viaducts, that expanded area bound by I Street to the south, the railroad tracks to the west and to the relocated tracks the north, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to the east could become very valuable for real estate development—much more so than the land north of the tracks, because it fronts Old Sacramento and could be directly connected to the Depot District.

The I-5/I Street interchange was built in the 1960s with the opening of I-5 through Sacramento. Heading westbound on I Street, currently motorists have four choices: I-5 northbound in the extreme right lane, the I Street Bridge westbound in lane one from the right, I-5 southbound in the lane one from the left, or I Street westbound (accessing 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> streets) on the left lane (see Figure 8). I Street is two-way under the I-5 viaduct between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> streets and one way westbound east of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, acting a paired couplet with J Street, which has direct access from I-5's north and



**Figure 8: The confusing series of options for motorists heading west on I Street**

southbound exits, as well as from the J Street viaduct connecting eastbound from West Sacramento across the I Street Bridge and southbound from the Jibboom Street viaduct.

Representatives from Caltrans indicated that these viaducts are reaching the end of their usable life, and indicated that there is benefit in simplifying access and egress from the I-5/I Street Interchange. This could be particularly beneficial where traffic merges between the eastbound J Street viaduct onto the southbound exit ramp, and where the proximity of the I Street entrance ramp and the Richards Boulevard exit ramp to the north in the River District encourages use of the interstate facility for local trips.

In its previous visits, the Rose Center panelists noted that the I Street I-5 northbound ramp not only poses pedestrian access challenges to the Depot District but also obstructs development potential in the western edge of the site. Due to the proximity of another northbound I-5 entrance on L Street three blocks to the south (in addition to Richards Boulevard 1 mile to the north and P Street three-quarters of a mile the south), the panel also strongly encouraged the City to work with Caltrans on the viability of simply removing the northbound entrance ramp from I Street. It may also be worth exploring the removal of the I-5 southbound ramp from I Street, but since the next closest southbound entrances are from Richards and from P Street, that may be less viable than the removal of the northbound entrance due to the redundancy of L Street.

However the City and Caltrans move ahead on that question, the removal of the northbound ramp and the I Street viaduct would result in less, and less high-speed, through traffic along I Street adjacent to the Depot District, which would drastically improve both the pedestrian environment as well as reduce conflicts between through traffic as pick-up/drop-off and transit access into the intermodal area. The panel also stressed that these changes need to be made in conjunction with creating a robust network of local streets to access and penetrate the Depot District. The City and Caltrans should study these potential changes and assess what projections the models indicate so they can make informed decisions about potential trade-offs.

## Infrastructure and Development Frameworks

### Street Framework

There are several major barriers to connectivity to the Depot District and its surrounding area. While the two largest are the railroad tracks and I-5, the city's gridded block and street structure also breaks down completely in the Railyards and partially in Downtown Plaza, creating super blocks that pose circulation challenges for redevelopment.

Before even considering the removal of I Street's I-5 northbound ramp or replacement of the I Street Bridge (and its associated viaducts on I, J and Jibboom streets), the panel saw the following short-term opportunities for site connectivity in the Depot District (see Figure 9):

- H Street should extend west of 5<sup>th</sup> through the site and under I-5 to connect with an extension of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to access Old Sacramento. The Depot building was originally designed to have two front doors, and both H and I streets should provide that access.
- F Street should also extend at grade under the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> street bridges along the southern edge of tracks and under I-5 to connect with an extension of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to access Old Sacramento. This will provide both vital bus access for the transit area and access to future development.



Figure 9: Short-term street improvements that make sense regardless of what happens to the I-5 northbound entrance ramp

In the longer-term, after the City and its partners assess the feasibility of the infrastructure projects discussed earlier, the panel saw significant additional connectivity benefits (see Figure 10):

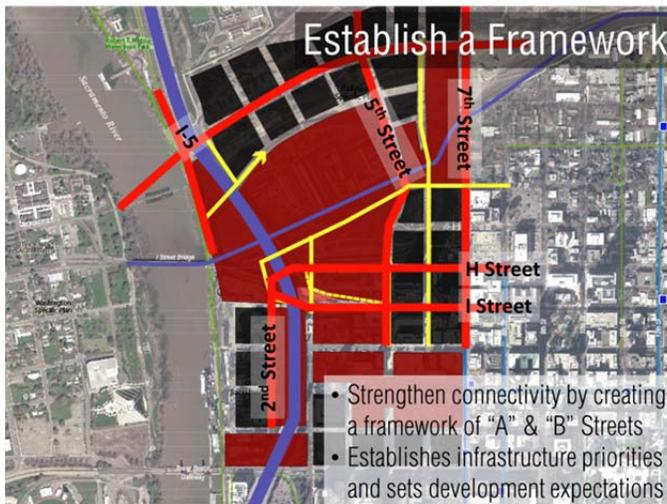
- Removal of the northbound I-5 entrance ramp from I Street would allow for 3<sup>rd</sup> Street to be extended north into the Depot District to connect to the future H and F street extensions.
- Replacing the old I Street Bridge with an at-grade bridge to the north would enhance the role of Railyards Boulevard as the major east-west arterial through the Railyards by making it the most direct route between Downtown and West Sacramento. This would have positive development implications in the Railyards due to its improved accessibility and visibility.



Figure 10: Long-term opportunities to improve street connections

- The removal of the Jibboom viaduct would allow Jibboom Street to continue at grade to access both the new north river crossing and Camille Lane to the south. This would also likely enhance the real estate potential along Camille Lane, which could serve as an alternate collector route for cross-river traffic. The new at-grade extension of Jibboom could extend all the way to the railroad tracks to provide access to a new park in the Railyards' Riverfront District and the Sacramento River Trail.
- In coordination with the Chinatown Mall, the 4<sup>th</sup> Street right-of way could be renovated to serve as a more at-grade pedestrian/bike path linking to the traditional front door of the Depot District. In the longer-term the City should study the potential to return 4<sup>th</sup> Street to a complete street in the downtown grid.
- Depending on the future redevelopment of Downtown Plaza, 4<sup>th</sup> Street between J and L could be restored to the city's downtown grid, which would improve local network connectivity to the Depot District, especially in conjunction with restoring 4<sup>th</sup> Street as a complete street between I and J. In principle, it would be good to restore all of Downtown Plaza's other lost street connections and return 5<sup>th</sup> Street to grade level, but restoring 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> streets would be particularly beneficial for access not only to the Railyards, but also to K Street.

Once the City has determined the feasibility and desirability of the big infrastructure moves it is considering and all the implications described above, it will need to establish and designate a street framework hierarchy (see Figure 11). By differentiating the different roles of different streets (e.g., which ones need to prioritize moving regional traffic, which ones are better for serving local needs, which ones are pedestrian priority pathways, etc.), the City can establish its infrastructure priorities and set development expectations to respond accordingly. For example, major arterials that move lots of cars attract a different type of development than pedestrian-oriented streets that keep traffic moving slowly and serve more as a sidewalk destination themselves rather than as a thoroughfare for vehicles.



**Figure 11: Potential framework for mode prioritization on A and B streets**

The panel recommended that the City pay significant attention to H, I, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> as pedestrian priority streets because of their critical role in providing access to the Depot District. Making pedestrians the priority travel mode on these streets will have specific implications for the design of sidewalks and intersections, land use and the relationship between buildings and the street, and parking and how vehicular traffic is managed. Operations along H Street will also have to accommodate the at-grade light rail between 7<sup>th</sup> and the intermodal area within the Depot District. As a multi-modal street, the city should carefully consider the treatment of bicycle access on H Street as well.

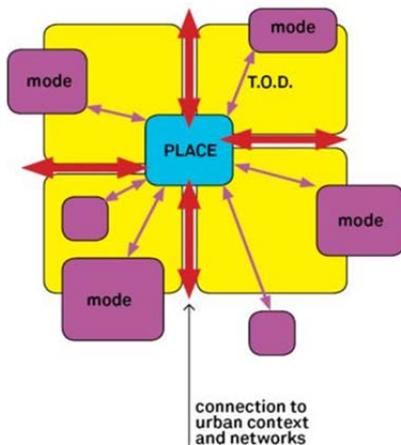
Looking outside the Depot District, the panel also recommended pedestrian priority design and operational management for 7<sup>th</sup> Street because of its role as a multi-modal street with light-rail accessing the Railyards from the north and south and bridging over the tracks to the north. North of the tracks, the panel recommended the City pedestrian prioritization for Jibboom Street from Railyards Boulevard to the south (where it could provide connections to the new north river crossing and the Riverfront District park).

Railyards Boulevard may need to be considered as an equity street that both moves a lot of traffic and provides a comfortable space for pedestrian activity as a destination street. Fortunately, it is already envisioned as a grand urban boulevard, which offers enough right-of-way to be designed for both those purposes.

### Transit Framework

When the original Rose Center panel recommended in January 2011 that the City plan for a transit district rather than a large intermodal facility, it did so because it saw this approach as a means to:

- Avoid an oversized and out of scale structure
- Lower its cost
- Allow for phasing
- Create joint development opportunities
- Add street life and create an urban place rather than just a transit center  
(see Figure 12)



**Figure 12: Relationship between transit facilities and development in a transit district concept (Courtesy of AECOM)**

The original concept of relocating the tracks was supported by this idea, as the historic Depot building itself would become a gateway to the transit district rather than serve as the transit service facility as it has in the past. And one of the transportation partners most receptive to this approach was the California High-Speed Rail authority, which saw operational benefits from moving its Sacramento terminal east of 6<sup>th</sup> Street rather than in the Sacramento Valley Station proper.

When the City took on the challenge of designing an entertainment/sports complex in the Depot District it added some constraints to the transit district concept, particularly for joint development opportunities. However, the work by AECOM and Fehr & Peers created a workable design concept for the light rail and bus functions of the intermodal. They endorsed the proposed light rail alignment that enters the Depot District from the east along H Street and turns north after crossing 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The station

would be at grade between H and F, then the alignment would turn east along the at-grade F Street until it reaches 7<sup>th</sup> Street and turns north, passing under the tracks at the future high-speed rail station and continuing on to new stations in the east end of the Railyards and the River District, eventually reaching Sacramento International Airport.

Immediately adjacent to the light-rail station, the City proposed locating 21 bus bays in a two-sided outdoor facility serving local, regional and inter-city destinations. The west bays of the bus transit station would be just 50 feet from the tunnel entrance to Sacramento Valley Station, where travelers would access long-distance and regional rail connections. The consultant team also developed the concept of an elevated plaza extension of G Street west of the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge ramp that would bridge over the light rail alignment and provide access down on the west side of the bus facility. This would give direct pedestrian access to the Depot District from G Street as well.

City staff and the current Rose Center panel agreed on the benefits of this design concept for the bus and light rail activity, and the panel recommends that the City retain it moving ahead regardless of how the rest of the Depot District is developed. It reinforces the panel's recommendations that 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, I, H, G, and F streets can all serve as access routes into the Depot District, in addition to the new main pedestrian tunnel under the tracks at Sacramento Valley Station.

It is imperative that the City and its partners get a better understanding of how transit riders access the station's various modes today, and develop reliable projections for how they expect that access to change in the future as new services are brought to the Depot District and as the area develops as a destination. For example, according to a 2003 study, nearly half of Capital Corridor riders were accessing the station via automobile, either as park-n-riders or as kiss-n-riders, before Regional Transit brought light rail into the station.

The City needs to extensively survey existing riders of Amtrak, Sacramento Regional Transit light rail and bus, other public transit bus providers, and riders of private bus carriers. This will increase understanding of how people are accessing these services in this location today and forecast how that mode split will change proportionally as services improve as planned in the future, such as the addition of streetcar service, the extension of the Green Line light rail to the airport, greater use of and more facilities for bicycles, and more destinations that will attract pedestrians. It will be critical to calibrate those projections based on focus group interviews with riders and expected future riders to understand future travel behavior.

After getting a comprehensive and clearer picture of expected future travel behavior, the City can then work with its transportation partners to design the facilities and access to meet those needs. In the absence of that, each transportation provider will simply ask for the maximum amount of real estate they can get. While no one can fault them for wanting to keep their needs from being constrained in the future, the City has many goals to achieve in the Depot District and the Railyards, and needs to ensure that trade-offs over precious real estate and site access and functionality are made with those larger goals in mind.

### Development Framework

With an understanding of this the framework and transit facility concepts, the panel then looked at how circulation would occur within the Depot District to determine how development could parcel out (see Figure 13). A key urban design concept that was not implementable with the arena but was recommended by the second Rose Center panel was an interior street (called 4<sup>th</sup> Street, for the sake of discussion) that would visually connect the Depot with the Central Shops. This street would need to be

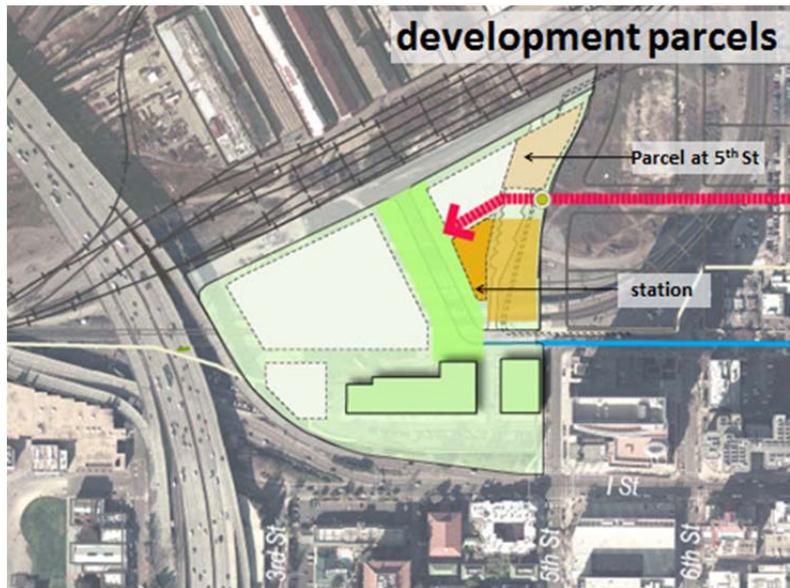


Figure 13: Development parcel concepts

aligned on the same axis as the Central Shops rather than on the axis of the downtown grid. It would connect from H Street to F Street along this axis within the site, essentially serving as the main street for the

Depot District, with the ability to also serve as a festival street—so it would need to be designed a complete street where pedestrians had priority but vehicles were also allowed. It could also serve as a festival street/public plaza and be closed to vehicles for special events as long as 2<sup>nd</sup>, H and F streets could continue to provide access in those times (as well as 3<sup>rd</sup> Street should the I-5 ramp be removed).

Based on this street alignment, the panel suggested that as the area is built out, some transit-related services might want to be located in the triangle-shaped parcel between the bus facility, the Sacramento Valley Station tunnel and 4<sup>th</sup> Street (see orange triangle on Figure x, below). This would leave a potential joint development parcel to the north that could include air-rights over the bus/light-rail station, the elevated plaza bridging to 5<sup>th</sup> Street and the rail station tunnel entrance below—a complicated project to design but an intriguing site due to its potential exposure to large numbers of travelers. Should the northbound I-5 on-ramp be removed, a new development parcel would also be created west of the Depot on the southeast corner of the extended 3<sup>rd</sup> and H streets.

At the heart of the site would be a large development parcel in an irregular quadrilateral (or trapezium shape) bound by 3<sup>rd</sup>, F, 4<sup>th</sup> and H streets. This site could be developed any number of ways, which could include either public access through the parcel or new alleys or interior streets. It would likely represent the most attractive development opportunity in the Depot District due to its size and its position on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, which could be one of the most unique public spaces in the country because of its potential to incorporate both modern and historic urban design in the context of a regional intermodal transportation in a Downtown environment near the riverfront.

### Connecting to the River

The panel saw the Sacramento River as a significant (and underutilized) asset for both cities. It is imperative that Sacramento both bring the city to the river and the river to the city. This means both having access to the river and pulling the open space network into the Railyards. But to make these connections work well, the city needs to understand what it is connecting to: the natural systems, open spaces and trails, parks and public facilities, and the land uses created by private development. Sacramento should work jointly with West Sacramento to develop a Sacramento River plan for both sides of the river.

While the potential removal of some of the ramps would eventually alleviate some barriers to the river, I-5 will remain as an elevated highway in the foreseeable future. But there are things that can be done to minimize that barrier and penetrate it to draw people to the river from the Railyards and to the Railyards from the river. Because of the height of the I-5 viaduct, it would be easy to build recreation uses like skate parks and to activate the land under the viaduct in key linkage areas. Public arts and lighting (static, dynamic or projection) are fantastic ways to enhance those connections that could provide an experience as people walk between the river and the Railyards. None of these are very expensive solutions; they can be done in the short term and in a cost-effective way to make this a place people want to go.

The open space system itself will probably be the most important way to bridge this connection. The quality of the riverfront district will ensure that it is a destination and it can draw people to the Railyards. It must be publicly accessible space that is available to the entire community. This will add value to the Railyards, to the Depot District and the overall community. While the original specific plan showed buildings in a park-like-setting and potential hotel development in Lot 35, the panel recommended that the City emphasize the public space aspects of that site as it works with future vertical developers to understand its actual development potential.

## Conclusion

The City should pursue the short-term, low-cost actions the panel recommended to celebrate accomplishments to date in the Railyards and inform the public about its future plans and take advantage of the site's new reality and draw people to it. All of the original panel's ideas about temporary programming and events in the Railyards can be applied to the Depot District itself today. As it has already started to do, the City should continue to take immediate steps to improve the pedestrian environment in the streets around the Depot District, including the design of the new County Courthouse building and improving access from temporary surface parking for transit users.

Governance and management of the Railyards project will be essential as its various projects move ahead. Different agencies are expected to carry-on their missions, but that kind of business-as-usual approach doesn't work well in a megaproject like the Railyards. The City Manager needs to empower centralized coordination within city government so everyone knows who to go to in order to get the information they need to proceed and make decisions. Externally, the city needs to have regular meetings with its various partners about current and potential projects to ensure coordination today and cooperation in the future.

In the longer-term, the City should pursue the replacement of the I Street bridge's non-rail functions, investigate the removal of the I-5 northbound on-ramp for I Street, create a framework and hierarchy for at-grade street connections to the Depot District, better understand its current and future access needs for the intermodal transportation services, develop a strategic plan to help guide the City's prioritization of resources for the various projects happening in its urban core, and work with West Sacramento to develop a river plan, especially now that it is exploring the idea of removing the viaducts and building new river crossings.

### About the Panel and the ULI Rose Center

The panel (see Figure 14) was led by Andre Brumfield, Director of Planning and Urban Design at Gensler in Chicago—who co-chaired the previous two Rose Center panels and performed some of the consultant work when previously employed by AECOM—and Con Howe, Managing Director of CityView's Los Angeles Fund—who also co-chaired the previous two panels and is a former planning director of both New York City and Los Angeles. Also returning from the original Rose Center panel was Frank Cannon, President of Union Station Neighborhood Company in Denver; and Danny Pleasant, Director of the City of Charlotte's



Figure 14: The panel and staff

Transportation Department. New to this panel was Jane Lim-Yap, Senior Planner with Kittelson & Associates in Orlando.

The panel was staffed by ULI's Jess Zimbabwe, Executive Director of the Rose Center—and a certified urban planner and licensed architect—and Gideon Berger, Senior Director of the Daniel Rose Fellowship program—also a certified urban planner.

Created in 2008 with a \$5 million endowment by Daniel Rose, chair of New York City-based Rose Associates, Inc., the Rose Center is part of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), a nonprofit education and research organization with a mission to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. Established in 1936, ULI has nearly 30,000 members worldwide representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines.

The flagship program of the Rose Center—the yearlong Daniel Rose Fellowship—focuses on leadership, integrated problem solving, public-private collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning for city leaders. Each fall the Rose Center invites the mayors of four large U.S. central cities to select a team of fellows from their city who will work with the center on a local land use challenge under their mayor's leadership. Austin, Charlotte, Detroit, Hartford, Houston, Kansas City, Louisville, Minneapolis, Nashville, Oakland, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Providence, Tacoma and Tampa have also participated in the program. To learn more about the Rose Center and its initial visit to Sacramento, visit [www.uli.org/rosecenter](http://www.uli.org/rosecenter).